

A Phonetic Study of Syllabic Constituents in Hong Kong Cantonese

by YIM, Chi Sing

Division of Humanities

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Abstract

Hong Kong Cantonese has been the focus of linguistic controversy for the whole of the last century. This thesis poses a solution to the phonetic and phonological problems at the root of this controversy, by contributing to the development of a recent concept of analysis by syllables, called universal syllabic view. Applying universal syllabic view to multi-speaker acoustic data, this thesis also demonstrates this new perspective by using it to provide a comprehensive study of Hong Kong Cantonese (HKC) pronunciation.

In order to achieve the research agenda of this thesis, various aspects and problematic topics of HKC phonology and phonetics were examined and tested by means of rigorous acoustic measurement: the phonetic natures of the HKC sibilants - [ts ts^h s] versus [tʃ tʃ^h ʃ]; the tense-lax contrasts of vowels – tense-lax counterparts in both closed syllables and diphthongs; length as a tonal feature in distinguishing checked and unchecked syllables; phonetic natures of the coda stops and their new variants; and the complex relation between tonal length, vowel tenseness and coda stops. This thesis poses new and definitive answers to these long debated questions.

This thesis should serve as a new starting point for future field studies of Cantonese phonetics.